

VZCZCXRO4292
RR RUEHDE RUEHROV RUEHTRO
DE RUEHDJ #1219/01 2930724
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 200723Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0934
INFO IGAD COLLECTIVE
SOMALIA COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DJIBOUTI 001219

SIPDIS
STATE FOR AF/E AND AF/RSA
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA-WATCHER
AFRICOM AND CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/10/20
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [DJ](#) [SO](#) [UG](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER DISCUSSES SOMALIA AND ERITREA
WITH AFRICOM DCMA

REF: 09 STATE 103664; 09 USUN NEW YORK 713; 08 DJIBOUTI 638
08 DJIBOUTI 378; 09 DJIOUTI 1152; 09 DJIBOUTI 915

CLASSIFIED BY: Eric Wong, DCM, U.S. Department of State, U.S.
Embassy, Djibouti; REASON: 1.4(A), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Meeting with visiting U.S. Africa Command's Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Affairs (AFRICOM DCMA), Foreign Minister Youssef hailed U.S. engagement in Djibouti and cited combating terrorism and piracy as "common interests" of the United States and Djibouti. He noted Djibouti's willingness to host AFRICOM facilities, and welcomed the continued presence of U.S. troops at Camp Lemonier. Citing instability in neighboring Somalia, FM Youssef reviewed Djibouti's role in providing diplomatic and military support for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) led by President Sheikh Sharif, which included training more than 600 TFG troops due to return to Mogadishu by October 20. While Sharif faced many challenges, the only alternative was the extremist al-Shabaab, which was supported by "African jihadists." FM Youssef announced that Djibouti was now selecting a small number of Djiboutian troops to support the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM); Somali-speaking Djiboutians could serve as interpreters, in intelligence or security, or to "mediate" between Anglophone and Francophone AMISOM forces and the Somali people. Djibouti could ultimately contribute "up to a battalion" (perhaps in January 2010), but was currently awaiting clarification from the African Union on command and rules of engagement. On Eritrea, FM Youssef said this regional "spoiler" sought to destabilize Djibouti by infiltrating rebels into northern Djibouti. Citing the lack of any progress on Eritrea's continued military occupation of Djiboutian territory at Ras Doumeira, FM Youssef said that Djibouti may be compelled to introduce its own draft resolution at the UN Security Council, as Djibouti was disappointed with the role of other African UNSC members. END SUMMARY.

DJIBOUTI: WILLING TO HOST AFRICOM HQ

12. (C) On October 14, AFRICOM DCMA, Amb. J. Anthony Holmes -- accompanied by Ambassador, DCM, and Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) POLAD -- met with Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssef. Youssef hailed U.S. engagement in Djibouti -- "a small

country living in a very dangerous neighborhood" -- and cited our "common interests" in fighting terrorism and maritime piracy in an unstable region. Youssouf welcomed the wide range of activities undertaken by AFRICOM, including on HIV/AIDS. As he had told AFRICOM Commander General Ward, during previous visits, Djibouti was even willing to host AFRICOM headquarters. While some countries had criticized the U.S. military's presence in Djibouti (most notably, according to Youssouf, Libya), Djibouti had "seized the momentum" in embracing cooperation with the United States. "Hosting U.S. troops supports our interests," FM Youssouf said, urging the U.S. to "stay more than 5 years." (NOTE. In September, the GODJ and the USG exchanged diplomatic notes extending the U.S. military's access to Camp Lemonier, from 2010 to 2015; see ref E. END NOTE.)

¶3. (C) DCMA Holmes expressed appreciation for Djibouti's partnership and support of the U.S. military. Senior administration officials had previously announced that the USG had no intention of establishing an AFRICOM headquarters in Africa, he said, as it would remain in Stuttgart until 2012. AFRICOM lacked its own dedicated forces, and had to rely on "requests for forces" (RFFs) to conduct operations in Africa; many of those forces were those present at Camp Lemonier, in Djibouti.

DJIBOUTI 00001219 002 OF 004

DJIBOUTI-TRAINED TFG TROOPS TO SECURE MOGADISHU

¶4. (C) Citing insecurity in neighboring Somalia, FM Youssouf reviewed Djibouti's role in hosting the UN-sponsored "Djibouti Process" -- political reconciliation talks that culminated in the enlargement of Somalia's Transitional Federal Parliament and the election of President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. Djibouti was working with the United States, France, the European Union, and AMISOM to help President Sharif. Citing the need to build capacity for Somalia's nascent national security forces, FM Youssouf highlighted Djibouti's training of troops for the TFG, noting the "graduation" of 1.5 battalions on October 15. (NOTE: More than 600 TFG troops completed training: 463 TFG troops trained by Djibouti, and another approximately 150 trained by French forces in Djibouti. The Djiboutian-trained forces are being airlifted to Mogadishu by USG-funded contract air. END NOTE.) These TFG troops would return to Mogadishu to establish a "green zone," as in Baghdad, and to provide security for the TFG, Youssouf said. Under a unified command, they would serve with AMISOM commanders for a "probationary period."

¶5. (C) Within Somalia's leadership, supporters of the moderate wing of the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS) remained somewhat aloof from those who had supported former TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf. Most of the current TFG ministers and parliamentarians were not in Mogadishu. President Sharif thus faced major challenges, FM Youssouf said, but the only alternative was the extremist al-Shabaab. Hizbul Islam leader Hassan Dahir Aweys, as well as the leaders of al-Shabaab, had rejected reconciliation with the TFG; they were now joined by "African jihadists" from countries such as Tanzania and Comoros, as well as fighters from Chechnya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and even Western countries.

DJIBOUTI READY TO CONTRIBUTE TROOPS TO AMISOM

16. (C) Djibouti was now ready to contribute Djiboutian troops to serve as interpreters or military observers for AMISOM, FM Youssouf said, and could provide up to a battalion in the future (i.e., after January 2010). A "small group" of Djiboutian troops was now being selected, he said, and would require training and equipment. Djiboutian forces could support AMISOM's "weak" intelligence or security operations; the September 17 suicide car-bombing of AMISOM headquarters underscored that AMISOM guards at checkpoints had no equipment to detect explosives. Somali-speaking Djiboutian troops could also serve to "mediate" between AMISOM and the Somali people, Youssouf said, as Ugandan and Burundian troops were only Anglophone or Francophone, respectively. Youssouf said he had discussed these issues, as well as the possibility of a larger GODJ contribution of a battalion, with African Union Special Envoy to Somalia Nicholas Bwakira. Prior to such a larger deployment, the GODJ was awaiting written clarification from Bwakira on AMISOM's new rules of engagement (ROE), as well as on how a possible Djiboutian battalion would be integrated into AMISOM. Djibouti would deploy troops to Somalia only under the auspices of AMISOM -- not unilaterally, Youssouf said.

DJIBOUTI 00001219 003 OF 004

17. (C) Ambassador Swan observed that an assessment team led by the Department's African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program coordinator, which visited Djibouti September 25-29, had recommended Djibouti for inclusion in ACOTA. If approved, ACOTA representatives planned to return in December -- which provided an opportunity for further engagement on a possible deployment in support of AMISOM. In the meantime, the USG had notified the UN sanctions committee that it intended to provide gear and equipment for TFG troops trained in Djibouti (ref A), as well as round-trip transportation for a second tranche of TFG troops to be trained in Djibouti (for which, names were required, for vetting). As this equipment was just now being procured and was not expected to arrive for at least 6-8 weeks, it would have to back-fill equipment provided by the GODJ to the TFG. In response to a question from FM Youssouf, Ambassador said there was no information to confirm press reports the Minister had seen that the USG would train 5,000 TFG troops in Jordan, and said this appeared unlikely.

ERITREA: CUT REMITTANCES TO A REGIONAL SPOILER

18. (C) Discussing other priorities for the Djiboutian military, FM Youssouf noted that Djibouti would host the upcoming (November 21-25) African Union East African Standby Brigade's field training exercise (EASBRIG FTX). As advance elements would be arriving soon, Djibouti could not afford to keep the current tranche of Somali TFG troops in Djibouti any longer, he said.

19. (C) Citing "security problems in the north," FM Youssouf asserted that neighboring Eritrea sought to destabilize Djibouti by sending rebel fighters to infiltrate the northern part of the country. Eritrea was "happy to play a spoiler role in this region," despite its own tremendous development challenges. Eritrea's President Isaias was "making his people suffer." Following June 2008 border clashes between Djiboutian and Eritrean troops, and Eritrea's continued occupation of Djiboutian territory at Ras Doumeira (refs B-D), Djibouti had recalled its ambassador from Asmara but had maintained diplomatic ties with Eritrea. Nevertheless, Eritrea had "closed every door" -- rejecting every attempt at mediation, whether bilateral or multilateral, Youssouf said.

¶10. (C) Ambassador Swan noted that the GODJ had proposed in New York to sanction the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) under a new standalone resolution. FM Youssouf highlighted that targeting the two per cent tax collected by the GSE on all incoming foreign remittances would be particularly effective, as the tax contributed directly to GSE revenues rather than benefitting the people of Eritrea. Freezing this tax and other assets, or imposing a travel ban on key GSE officials, were other items to consider, Youssouf said.

¶11. (C) Djibouti may be compelled to introduce a draft UNSC resolution (condemning Eritrea) itself, as Djibouti was disappointed with the three African members (i.e., Burkina Faso, Libya, and Uganda) of the UN Security Council, Youssouf said. Djibouti was "not at all satisfied" with Uganda, which Djibouti assessed was facing undue pressure by Libya. Uganda's UN PermRep had proposed a "very weak" draft on Eritrea, despite FM Youssouf having personally provided Ugandan Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa with

DJIBOUTI 00001219 004 OF 004

a stronger draft resolution, during a meeting in the United States in August. Youssouf said that Kenyan Foreign Minister Moses Wetangula had pledged to work on improving Uganda's position on the matter, as Uganda was not representing the interests of IGAD member states. Referring to consultations with Burkina Faso's foreign minister, Youssouf said that Burkina Faso was supportive of Djibouti's position, but "does not want to take the lead" in introducing a resolution condemning Eritrea.

¶12. (C) COMMENT. FM Youssouf's announcement that Djibouti is now ready to contribute forces to AMISOM reflects Djibouti's continued support -- diplomatic, political, and military -- for President Sharif's TFG, which arose from the UN-sponsored "Djibouti Process." As early as July 2009, when Djibouti began training TFG troops at its military school, FM Youssouf discussed the possibility of a Djiboutian deployment to Somalia (ref E). Senior military leaders also corroborate plans to deploy Djiboutian forces to AMISOM: Djibouti's chief of defense (CHOD), Major General Fathi A. Hussein, said on October 15 (septel) that Djibouti planned to send five officers by the end of October, and up to a 300-man battalion in the future. As Djibouti's entire force structure is estimated at approximately 5,000-6,000 troops, any foreign deployment reflects a strong commitment by the Djiboutian military. END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) This message was cleared by AFRICOM DCMA Holmes.
SWAN